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As the Chairman Spoke, His CIA Beeper Beeped

Beep for the Chairman

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The Senate's new intelligence overseer, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), has disclosed that he is equipped with a pocket beeper to advise him of the launching of CIA covert operations.

Inouye, chairman of the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence, revealed the unusual arrangement in a Sept. 13 speech in Honolulu that went unreported off the island.

As he spoke to the Defense Credit Union Council's annual conference, according to Hawaiian news accounts, Inouye's intelligence beeper beeped.

"I must be on call at any hour of the day or night . . .," the Hawaii Democrat explained. "I must carry a beeper so that I know instantly when a notification of a covert action project has been made by the President."

An Inouye aide explained yesterday that the beeper can be activated only by his private secretaries in Washington and Honolulu, his administrative assistant and the staff director of the intelligence committee.

"It is supposed to be used for intelligence business only," the aide said.

In another part of his speech, Inouye appeared to break the strict security rules of his own committee by announcing that "my committee has been notified" of new covert CIA operations being initiated.

Under the rules of the intelligence oversight committee, "no member of the committee . . . shall disclose in whole or in part, or by way of summary . . . any testimony given to the committee in executive session."

Spencer Davis, press spokesman for the intelligence committee, said Inouye's disclosure did not involve the substance of the executive session testimony.

Since last December, when Congress forced the end of CIA's covert operations in Angola, the general public understanding was that such activities had been ended. The CIA had no comment yesterday on Inouye's statement. A spokesman asserted the agency had no copy of the speech.

The White House and intelligence officials said late last year they would not be able to initiate new covert activities because of leaks, such as the one that occurred on Angola, when they reported such operations to seven congressional committees, as required by law.

CIA Director George Bush, in a speech of his own last week, reinforced that impression. He said he hoped covert operations had not been

finally destroyed as a weapon in the U.S. arsenal because of the problems created by reporting to the House and Senate about them.

Inouye's statement was, therefore, the first official notice that the agency had again been authorized by the President to begin new covert operations.

Knowledge in Washington of the substance of Inouye's Honolulu speech caused some ripples among his colleagues on the committee.

Several members voiced surprise that the chairman on his own had disclosed the existence of new CIA covert operations in the face of the committee's own rules.

One Inouye committee member chuckled after reading about the beeper and recalled that shortly after the committee was formed there was a problem getting members together to receive the first CIA covert operations briefing.

"We all took notification seriously," this senator said, "and it was suggested we all get beepers." The idea was dropped, he recalled.

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